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'The Construction of Popular Taste According to Colombian Filmmakers in the 1940s'

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## The construction of popular taste according to Colombian filmmakers of the 1940s<sup>[1]</sup>

### Abstract

This paper aims to understand the notion of the “popular” and the “national”, as it was used during the first period of sound films in Colombia (ten feature films made between 1939 and 1945). It argues that filmmakers attempted to create a national cinema merging conventions of Mexican musical comedy with a constructed definition of Colombian folklore, but never achieved commercial success. These films’ failure as popular cinema can be attributed to their contradictory ideological perspective, attempting to collate an elite “national culture” project with the forms and genres of mass media. The paper explores exhibition practices in Bogotá, presenting cinemas as social spaces where the distance between different audiences was inscribed in the codes of ‘good taste’, thus constructing operative definitions and evaluations of the ‘popular’.

**Keywords:** National cinema, Colombian cinema, 1940s, folklore, popular audiences, cinema-going, exhibition.

In 1941, the first Colombian sound film – *Flores del Valle*, directed by Máximo Calvo - was premiered in Bogota. Ten feature films were made and released in Colombia between 1941 and 1945,<sup>[2]</sup> a significant amount considering that in the previous fifteen years only a few newsreels and State-sponsored documentary shorts had been released. However, until recently these films had been neglected by most scholars, because they are widely regarded as aesthetically and technically poor (Martínez Pardo 1978:179, Salcedo Silva 1981:191). In the past two years, Fundación Patrimonio Fílmico Colombiano, with the aid of several other Colombian and foreign institutions, has restored three of the ten films.<sup>[3]</sup> Three more are in a delicate condition, and the rest of them have not been found.

The available materials, as well as other documents compiled by historians, suggest that this set of films be considered as a period. The main distinctive characteristic shared by the films is a concern with national themes, either in the form of traditional folk music and dance or historical reconstruction. Formal characteristics, dictated by precarious technical conditions, are constant: fixed camera, single-channel soundtrack and monotonous, low-contrast cinematography. The prevailing style has been said to be a local adaptation of Mexican formulae, thus privileging rural settings, simple romantic plots and a tone that oscillates between comedy and melodrama.

Mexican influence is indeed undeniable, but Colombian films of the 1940s are interesting on their own grounds, and they prove very revealing when considered in their historical context. During the 1930s and

1940s important cultural debates pervaded the intellectual atmosphere in Colombia, leading to definitions that would hold sway until today. A project of construction of “national identity” was under way, one that would only start changing when the new Constitution of 1991 acknowledged and embraced diversity. National cinemas are particularly rich scenarios for the study of the negotiations around identity, since the centre-periphery dualism is very clear, and the problem of “national culture” can only be stated in relation with the non-national. As an apparently endogenous project of identity formation becomes a part in a dialogue with a wider context, it reveals its fractures. Given that at this stage an ideal of national film *industry* is privileged, the films are conceived, in principle, as reaching out to the largest possible audience. However, the way audiences are inscribed in these films reveals a more bounded address, which constructs the viewers as sharing some features of class, cultural capital, lifestyle and ideology. I will begin by proposing two examples, in which the contradictions contained in these films can be easily identified.

### ***Flores del Valle*** (Máximo Calvo, 1941)

This drama narrates the rejection suffered by Rosa, a country girl who moves to the city and has to overcome the prejudices of the urban ‘high society’, demonstrating the moral superiority of country people. Bambuco, a traditional Colombian musical genre from the Andean region, is heard throughout the movie. There are two scenes in which bambuco is danced, and they allow for sharp comparison. The first one is a party held at the family’s farm the day before departing for the city. In this scene, a group of peasants are dressed up as ‘typical peasants’ – a romanticized, anachronistic version of their own selves – and they perform the dance in perfect choreography in front of the farm owner’s daughters and friends. The spectators remain seated and applaud politely.

Later, in the city, an evening is arranged for the ‘introduction to society’ of Rosa, at an elegant club. She stands on stage on her own and shows her abilities: She recites a poem, plays the violin, and sings. Then, with her sisters, she dances bambuco, presented as “the Colombian national dance”. The sophisticated audience looks unimpressed.

Bambuco is present in one way or other in all of the films. It was also a matter of discussion among musicians at the time, and the history of this musical genre was interpreted (or fabricated) so as to legitimize its consecration as ‘the’ Colombian music. It arguably retains that status to this day, although other genres, especially from the Northern part of the country, have attained more recognition. *Flores del Valle* is a good example of how ambiguous the role of bambuco was at the time. It is regarded as a folk, country-dance tradition, but the peasants dance it as a choreographed show for their masters. However, the mythically good, simple country people of a higher social standing do enjoy it and can also dance it as a refined ballroom dance. On the contrary, city dwellers would rather dance vals, fox-trot or havaneras.

After a century of debates about its origin, notation, purity, and so on, by the 1930s bambuco was a vanishing genre. It was being displaced by recorded music from all over the Americas, and a veritable rescue campaign was launched, commanded by composer Emilio Murillo, whose songs feature profusely in several films. An excellent history of bambuco, relating the bitter disputes held over it by musicians and intellectuals, and featuring some references to film, is contained in a recent doctoral dissertation by Carolina Santamaría Delgado at Pittsburgh University (Santamaría Delgado, 2006; see also Cortés Polanía, 2004).

***Sendero de luz*** (Emilio Álvarez Correa, Ducrane Films, 1945)

This is a drama with comedy moments, about the rivalry of two friends for the love of a girl. It also takes place in a rural setting, this time with little reference to the city. The first sequence shows a rough landscape in which an 'arriero' (a national heroic type, transporting goods on horseback along primitive mountain paths) is guiding a mule train uphill. This very ordinary scene is accompanied by pompous classical music. Even one of the producers would later acknowledge that this contrast resulted ridiculous (Duperly Angueyra 1978). Even so, most of the soundtrack still consists of orchestral music, which might have been lifted from foreign movies or from imported records.

More than half an hour into the film, the mandatory 'serenade scene' appears. The musicians come into the frame and start playing Spanish-style guitar music. But the lead character interrupts them, saying: "Why don't you play something national, a bambuco?" They of course oblige. Bambuco reappears later in its instrumental variety, serving as background music for an outdoors scene that obviously could not be shot with synchronic sound. In this film it is evident how a musical genre that is supposed to be popular, has to be presented emphasizing the fact that it is *national*, and how including *bambuco* somehow disrupts the action – it is literally an interruption. The fact that most of the film features classical music also shows how a variety of influences – not only Mexican cinema – shaped Colombian films of the 1940s.

Bambuco, as well as naïve romanticism, chaste love stories, and strict moral principles, were clearly regarded as rural customs, and they were probably also felt as vanishing values. This is not trivial, for Colombia was at the time undergoing an accelerated transformation from rural to urban life. This romanticized view of life in the country was presented as the true essence of nationality, and it was thus presented to an urban audience.<sup>[4]</sup> As I will argue, the 'popular culture' consumed by urban audiences was different from the 'popular culture-as-folklore' imagined by the ruling classes, and it was also different from the elite tastes. Urban popular culture was a concoction of local traditions and new, foreign influences coming through the radio and the cinema. National culture as a dissected version of rural life was clearly a fiction, arguably conceived from the elite sectors. The formal tensions that arise in these films account for the attempt at pleasing both audiences, and they indicate the struggles between 'national' and 'popular' representations of culture, autochthonous vs. international artistic forms, and, possibly, rural vs. urban lifestyles.

### **Historical context**

In 1930 the Liberal Party won the presidential elections, after almost five decades of Conservative rule. The administrations of Enrique Olaya, Alfonso López and Eduardo Santos, between 1930 and 1945, constitute a period known as the Liberal Republic. Theirs were governments with a populist colour, similar to those in other Latin-American countries. Along with ambitious infrastructure projects and the implementation of a secular institutional apparatus, culture was a major concern for these administrations. In this period, the Eurocentric notion of culture (civilization through imitation) is abandoned, to embrace a 'mestizo' definition that will attempt to build a worthy culture out of the existing endogenous elements. This entails the selection, stylization and consecration of certain folkloric expressions, in order to establish a national tradition that has enough appeal to bind together very different communities.

Historian Renán Silva asserts that, during the Liberal Republic, Colombian popular culture in its still-existing form was invented (2000:10). The Ministry of Education undertook several institutional crusades to disseminate, investigate, and systematize the spontaneous artistic manifestations of 'the people'.

Among these enterprises, the *General Compendium of Colombian Folklore*, by Guillermo Abadía Morales, the National Folklore Commission, the *Cultura Aldeana* project, the *Revista de las Indias* and the National Radio are worthy of mention. It is in the interstices of these projects that the definition of national popular culture was shaped. Silva offers a characterization of this constructed category:

It was a distinctive feature of the *liberal invention of popular culture* having imagined it on the basis of a *folkloric matrix*, that is, an approach to “popular” culture that sees it at a time as typical and exotic, but especially as the embodiment of the “national soul” and the keeper of timeless traditions. These traditions were supposed to be the basis of all possible future, for they expressed the roots of the nationality; this image was constructed through an idyllic simplification of peasant life (Silva 2005:225).

It might be tempting to associate the filmmakers with the government, and thus see their aesthetic choices as expressions of the official cultural policy. In 1942, a law that intended to stimulate film production through tax exemptions and other measures was passed by the Congress. However, it seems best to be very prudent about this association. Firstly, the law was never regulated, so it had no action during the period. Second, the only filmmakers who had had any formal relation with the government, the Acevedo brothers, were only concerned with newsreels and documentaries. And, most importantly, the main figures in Colombian filmmaking of the time were foreigners.

### **A national cinema made by foreigners**

Given that the 1940s films have a reputation of being ‘nationalistic’ in a touristic manner (landscape, music, and romance), it might seem paradoxical that the most influential directors were not Colombian. Máximo Calvo, who directed two of the films, was a Spaniard who had come to the country in the second decade of the 20th century, hired to shoot a now-legendary film, *María* (1921) (Buitrago, 2005). Gabriel Martínez, who wrote and directed four films, had arrived from Chile in 1939, as playwright and director in the Alvarez-Sierra Company, who had been touring South America performing variety shows and children’s plays. Roberto Saa Silva, who directed one film and co-directed another, was also from Chile, although he had worked as a technician in Hollywood for a short while, and had directed the first Peruvian sound film. The ‘Swiss gentleman’ Federico Katz wrote and produced two films, while the Spaniard Miguel Joseph y Mayol directed one.

In considering the implications of this foreign input for the making of films that would be marketed as ‘national’, the case of the Chilean variety company is the most illustrative. The Alvarez-Sierra company was a theatrical group formed in Chile before 1930. By the time they arrived in Colombia in 1939, they had ample experience in putting up variety shows, comedies and operettas. Very soon they had found a place to perform on a commercial radio station. In 1942 they were bankrupt, figured the movies would be profitable, and entered in a co-production to make *Allá en el Trapiche* (Gabriel Martínez, 1941). After that, they produced three more features under the name of Patria Films.

When compared with *Flores del Valle* or *Castigo del Fanfarrón* (the last film by Calvo, 1945), it becomes clear that the Patria movies are not nostalgic nor a celebration of Arcadian countryside. They are set in the country, but their characters come from the city and intend to go back to it. Their modern customs clash with tradition, and the filmmakers take sides with the modern. This ideological decision is informative of the cultural transformation that Colombia was experiencing during that decade, and is also indicative of the audiences that Patria Films was trying to reach. Experienced in the popular stage and the mass

medium of radio, the Alvarez-Sierra family were not too concerned about middle-class preservation of cultural status. Their disregard for enforced propriety extends to music: whereas there is some bambuco, a wider range of Latin American genres appear on Patria movies, most prominently bolero. 'Tropical' music from the Northern coast of Colombia, treated with racially-tinted moral suspicion by the Church and the upper classes (Wade 2000), was promptly incorporated in the Alvarez-Sierra repertoire, both live and on film.

In this case at least, it can be argued that foreign filmmakers could indeed have the finger on the audience's pulse and follow the popular trends. However, they did not try to market the films on the basis of their popular appeal, but of their national character, as indicated by press ads published before premieres: *Allá en el trapiche* "is destined to be hugely successful, for it shows all things beautiful in our country's music and landscape",<sup>[5]</sup> and *Bambucos y corazones* "will triumph, because it is well crafted and it has our landscapes, customs and music".<sup>[6]</sup> Some of them (*Allá en el trapiche*, *Golpe de gracia* and *Bambucos y corazones*) were indeed successful, although not "hugely" so; and production came to a halt in 1945. Some Colombian films had spectacular premieres and excellent box office results for one or two weeks in first-run theatres, but once they descended to neighbourhood cinemas, they vanished in two days (Martínez Pardo, 1978:149). It is therefore interesting to examine the viewing practices of first-run and neighbourhood cinema audiences comparatively, in order to gain insight into the ideological grounds on which Colombian films were consumed.

### **Film exhibition and film-going in Bogota**

It has been assumed that Mexican cinema dominated the Colombian screens from the 1930s on (Martínez Pardo 1978, Archila Neira 1991:182). However, this assumption can be proven false, at least for the case of Bogotá. A sampling of movie showtimes for the last week of May between 1937 and 1942 reveals that at least 55% of the films being screened were American. Mexican and Argentinean films rank at about 7% each, being surpassed by French films that represent a 9.4% of the listings. And, when observed more closely, other clear patterns start to emerge.

#### **"Popular Mondays"**

New films usually opened on either Wednesdays or Thursdays and Saturdays. Therefore, theatres would screen older films on Mondays, at lower prices, advertising their programme as "popular special" or "great popular day". But, besides being older and cheaper, the films exhibited on Mondays also reflect some of the values ascribed to the term "popular". In order to highlight this point, I studied the movie listings for three first-run theatres and three neighbourhood theatres in Bogotá for one Monday and one Saturday in May, between 1937 and 1945.

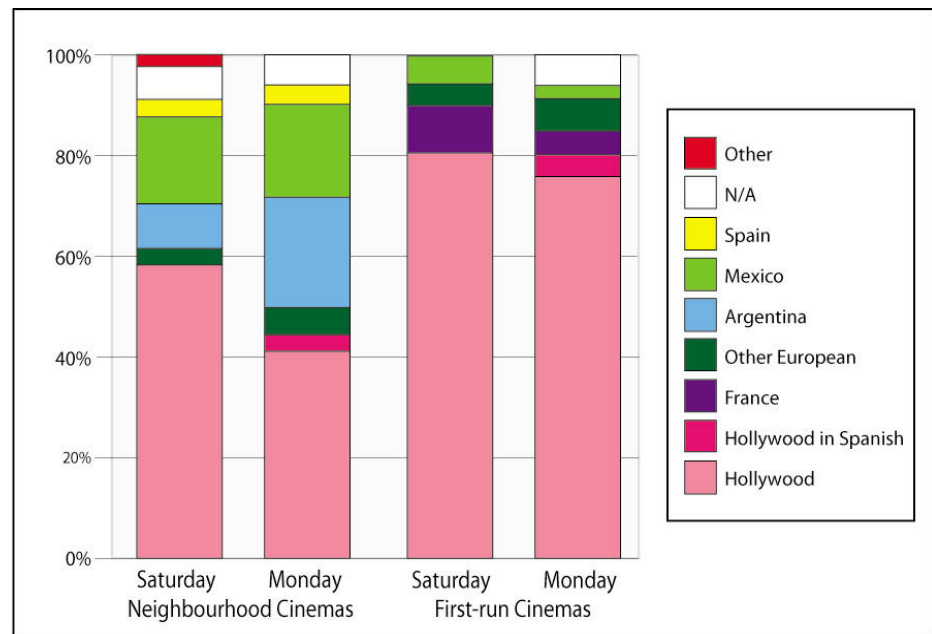


Figure 1. Origin of films playing in six theatres in Bogotá on the last week of May between 1937 and 1945

As Figure 1 shows, there is a 10% decline in Hollywood presence, and twice as many Argentinean films on 'popular Mondays' than on Saturdays. Mexican films remain relatively stable. But does this mean that Argentinean cinema was competing successfully against Hollywood cinema for the lower-income market? Could it be assumed that theatre managers conformed to their perception of "what people want"? Figure 2 suggests this might be the case for neighbourhood theatres, which account for most of the variation in Figure 1. First-run theatres do not exhibit a significant change between Saturday and Monday programmes.

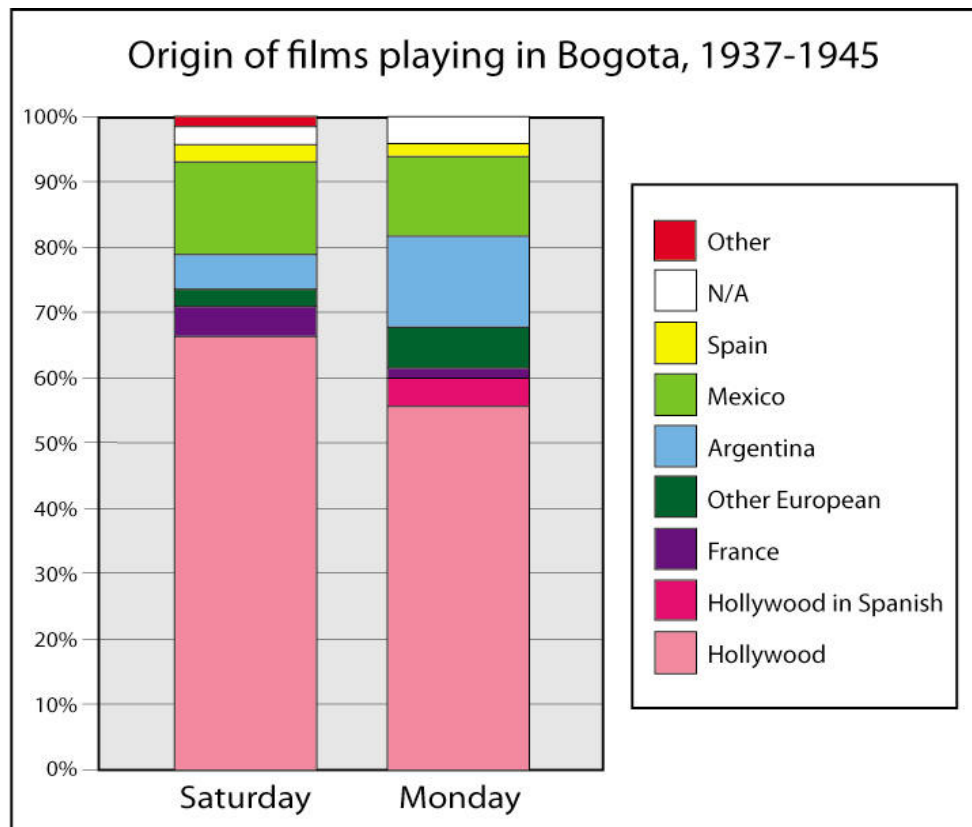


Figure 2. Origin of films playing in three first-run theatres and three neighbourhood theatres in Bogotá on the last week of May between 1937 and 1945

This data show that the greatest divide is between first-run and neighbourhood cinemas, not between “popular” and normal days. This could be an indicator that the audience for first-run cinemas did not really change on “popular Mondays”, as even then the ticket would cost twice as much as in a neighbourhood theatre. On the other hand, neighbourhood cinemas would attract an even lower-income audience on Mondays – people for whom \$0.10 made a big difference.<sup>[7]</sup> Language plays a determinant role in both cases. If, at \$0.40 on Mondays, first-run theatres could attract a larger audience, it would likely be composed of students and the lower middle classes, who could read the subtitles on Hollywood films. If, on the other hand, at \$0.10 on Mondays, neighbourhood theatres could attract an audience that would not pay \$0.20 on other day of the week, then it is likely that many of them would be among the over three million illiterate Colombians (46% of the population over age 7, according to Castellanos 2001:343).

A greater illiteracy rate among neighbourhood-theatre audiences could also be the reason behind a predominance of serials, action movies and slapstick comedy among the Hollywood films that were screened in those venues. This scenario shows a lower-income audience consuming a variety of films from different parts of the world, contrasted with a higher-income audience that consumed almost exclusively Hollywood cinema. Arguably, this practices helped shape the ways that these audiences imagined themselves and each other, and produced long-term cultural consequences. The influence of Mexican cinema in popular practices throughout Latin America has been noticed by several scholars, such as Carlos Monsiváis (1994) and John King (2000).

The issue of language is also important because a knowledge (however fictitious) of English was, and still

is, a mark of distinction and cosmopolitanism. Commenting on the street use of English terms in Bogotá, Englishman Charles N. Staubach reported, in 1946:

*Goodbye, So long, Thank you* [in English in the original] are heard on all sides. The recently released Colombian-made film, *Bambucos y corazones*, wholly Colombian in its subject, acting, and technique, nevertheless puts these expressions into the mouths of the characters who belong to the “smart set” – that is, to *la high* (Staubach 1946:61).

Writing about the arrival of sound cinema to Chile, Jacqueline Mouesca reports that English language films were first screened with no subtitles, and ‘the snobbism of those who pretend to understand English first filled the theatres’, even though they secretly knew they had not understood a word (Mouesca 1994). It is not at all unlikely that a similar phenomenon also occurred in Colombia.

Besides price and language, a symbolic barrier kept first-run and neighbourhood theatre audiences clearly separated, even though the cinemas themselves might be a few blocks away. Colombia has been a traditionally classist society, and Mexican cinema was obviously suspect from the point of view of elite taste. The advertisement for George Cukor’s *Holiday*, which was playing at a first-run theatre, is almost a statement of principles in cinematographic elite taste:

Fun... but not vulgar! Romantic... but not cheesy! Intellectual... but assimilable! Made with all the artfulness that selected spirits demand, but with the primordial idea of entertaining all audiences from all over the world! At the theatre that cares for its prestige: Roxy.<sup>[8]</sup>

First-run theatres employed in their advertisement phrases such as ‘the true social theatre in Bogotá’, ‘for the most refined audiences’, ‘the theatre of elegant people’ or ‘aristocratic ambience’. (In a rather ironic attempt at playing the same game, one neighbourhood theatre announced itself as ‘the social theatre of Las Cruces’, Las Cruces being a working-class *barrio*). One female movie-goer reported that ‘people who attended the Apolo (first-run) wore shoes’ (Mrs Feldman in Fúquene Barreto 1999:16). Bogotá is frequently described by journalists and writers of the time as a very boring place, and, as in other countries, going to the cinema became a social event, at least for the upper classes. In a conservative, Catholic society, it was a chance for young women to dress up and be seen; it was also an opportunity for displaying good taste and manners, *distinction*; ‘devaluated’ Mexican cinema would not seem like an acceptable option. However, one particular case will suffice to prove that this statement cannot be taken at face value.

### **The strange case of Teatro Real**

The Real was a first-run theatre, and by 1944 it was the most expensive. It was located in the very heart of Bogotá (Ávila Gómez 2006). But it displays a very particular exhibition pattern. Up to 1939, it screened almost solely European cinema. For example, on the last week of May 1938 the two listed films are *Die Fledermaus* (Paul Verhoeven, Germany, 1937) and *Forfaiture* (Marcel L’Herbier, France, 1937). In 1940 and 1941 the Real offers both European and Hollywood cinema. And from 1942 on, it only screens Spanish language films, most of them Mexican. It must be noted that this is not a generalized tendency; first-run theatres do not screen more Mexican cinema after 1942 than they did before. What is more surprising is that the Real keeps its prices high and its reputation as a quality cinema.

Why did the Real stop projecting French cinema? World War II is not a sufficient explanation, because six-



or seven-year-old films were regularly screened, and other theatres did continue to schedule French films, although not so consistently as the Real had done. Perhaps there were other reasons behind it, as a 1938 polemic suggests. On April 24<sup>th</sup>, Emilia, a columnist for *El Espectador*, a major national newspaper, writes a biting tirade against French cinema. She writes:

The film-going audience of Bogotá is desperate, bored, sick, of the savings plan embraced by some cinema entrepreneurs, set on bringing Mexican films that cannot be described, because in Spanish language there is no adjective strong enough; or French films, unspeakably dreadful.<sup>[9]</sup>

The audience no longer believes that 'artists from the Comédie-Française' guarantee a quality film, she says. She argues that exhibitors only screen these films because they are cheaper than American ones.

Another column, by Poldy (pseudonym), appears four days later, reminding the readers of good French films that have been seen in Bogotá.<sup>[10]</sup> *La Kermesse héroïque* (Jacques Feyder, 1937) and *La Bataille* (Nicolas Farkas, 1933) are two of the examples. Poldy also makes vows for the exhibition of *La Grande illusion* (Jean Renoir, 1937). Thus, Mr. Eduardo Laverde, the distributor of French films, writes a letter to the editor promising to invite Emilia and Poldy to see *La Grande illusion*, which he has brought 'after countless difficulties of all kinds',<sup>[11]</sup> in order to prove the quality of French cinema.

Emilia's denunciation of 'literary themes' and 'Comédie-Française actors' points to a fault line in the elite sector that had so far been the Real's audience. As urban society grows, it becomes more complex, and the bourgeoisie seems to become increasingly divided along taste fractions. Thus, the same strategies used to attract a reluctant but wealthy audience, unconvinced of the legitimacy of film as art, were no longer effective in all quarters. Exhibitors seem to be slow in recognising this change, since in this episode they continue to defend French cinema on the basis of its literary connections. A statement published by the Real's management argues that it is not true that French films are cheaper, because exhibitors are forced to buy exclusivity rights for each film. It asserts that the programme at the Real 'has deserved the most enthusiastic welcome by the audience of the capital, especially the great works of the most distinguished French writers, faithfully committed to the silver screen and performed by the most outstanding European artists'.<sup>[12]</sup>

But why did the Real switch to Mexican cinema? This question calls for more research and will have to remain unanswered for now. It might have coincided with a change of location, or other urban transformations. It is interesting, however, to notice that the Real retained its position as one of the foremost first-run theatres. This can be understood as a symptom that Mexican cinema was gaining legitimacy, or as a symptom that at least a fraction of the elite enjoyed Mexican cinema, and needed a "decent" venue to go and see it. Perhaps the decadence of 'literary' French cinema is also part of the same process, the conquest of all classes by popular culture. Or, rather, the defeat of an illusory, elite cosmopolitanism by a very real process of transnational cultural circulation.

This process had already been detected much earlier concerning music. In a 1936 article by Guillermo Salinas Cossio, he states his ideas about how Colombian music should be developed into a cultivated form:

All attempts for nationalization must be based on popular music, or, more precisely, on popular song and dance (...) But, what is to be considered popular music? Can it be accepted that "La Paloma", "La Cubana", "El canto del cisne", and other songs that

have been vulgarized in most Hispano-American countries, represent popular music? No (...), we must distinguish true popular music from popularized or *populachera* music, which is a result of an amateur's creation or the vulgarisation of songs written by professional musicians (Salinas Cossio 1936).

Popular culture could only be considered legitimate if it could prove that it truly had emerged from 'the people'. It is in this context that Colombian films of the 1940s are to be considered. They sought to appear legitimate, and were consequently inclined to make blatant displays of nationality. The filmmakers tried to attract the attention of investors and of the government with a tacit commitment to the prestigious project of constructing the national identity. Simultaneously, they tried to compete for people's preference in a merciless marketplace. They were not completely successful on either front, because what was at stake was very different in each case. Urban popular taste was becoming increasingly international due to the influx of recorded music, radio and the cinema, and it resembled less and less the 'popular' constructed from above as a recuperation of folk traditions. The 'popular' and the 'national' seem to have been, at least for a moment, incompatible strategies.

## Conclusion

The 1940s were a period of transition in various areas of Colombian life. The politics were changing, the cities were growing, and modernity was slowly permeating tradition. As a result, film audiences and their aesthetic tastes were also transforming, adopting the overtly hierarchical structure marked by the exhibition system and thus establishing unspoken boundaries of taste. For better or worse, those ten films made by foreigners marked the end of a certain naïveté: they address one national-popular audience, an imagined community that had not (and did not) come into existence. These movies, like bambuco, are hardly popular nowadays, and Colombia is decidedly urban, not for lack of rural inhabitants but for the utter disregard shown towards them by most spheres of national life, including contemporary cinema. But these ten precarious films still bear testimony of an exciting time of tensions and definitions.

Considering the context of exhibition and the choice of films available to audiences on different incomes is a feasible way to gain insight into historical viewing practices. In this case, it has shown a clear stratification of 'taste cultures', in which an increasingly complex urban society draws lines of distinction. As a counterpoint, however, it has also shown the growing power of mass media and international popular forms, even on elite circles. Even if this approach does not, of course, grant 'direct access' to the audiences of the past, it does illuminate the way in which these audiences were read and constructed by their contemporaries: exhibitors, critics, filmmakers and fellow moviegoers. A more careful methodological reflection would reveal the informal social structures that motivate the elite's image of a popular audience, and the researcher's image of both. Finally, the shifting social environment in 1940s' Colombia proved to be a difficult one to negotiate for filmmakers, and beyond poor technical quality or limited release, their contradictory address and timid engagement with popular culture is the most likely cause for the collapse of the industrial experiment.

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## Notes

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Fundacion Patrimonio Filmico Colombiano, where a great effort has gone into preserving what little survives of these movies. Alejandra Orozco and Rito Alberto Torres have facilitated access to the films and shared their valuable insights. This version was revised whilst studying at Glasgow University, thanks to a scholarship granted by Programme AlBan, an European Union high level scholarship programme for Latin America.

[2] The films that have been documented as completed and released are:

*Flores del Valle* (Máximo Calvo / Calvo Films, 1941);

*Allá en el trapiche* (Emilio Álvarez Correa / Ducrane Films, 1943);

*Anarkos* (Roberto Saa Silva / Cofilma, 1944);

*Antonia Santos* (Miguel Joseph y Mayol and Gabriel Martínez / Patria Films, 1944);

*Golpe de gracia* (Emilio Álvarez Correa and Oswaldo Duperly / Ducrane Films, 1944);

*Bambucos y corazones* (Gabriel Martínez / Patria Films, 1945);

*La canción de mi tierra* (Federico Katz / Cofilma, 1945);

*Castigo del fanfarrón* (Máximo Calvo / Calvo Films, 1945);

*Sendero de luz* (Emilio Álvarez Correa / Ducrane Films, 1945);

*El sereno de Bogotá* (Gabriel Martínez / Patria Films, 1945).

Some other projects were reported by the press, but none of those seem to have been completed.

[3] *Flores del Valle*, *Allá en el trapiche* (28 min.), and *Sendero de Luz*. More information about these films can be found in Patrimonio Fílmico website, [www.patrimoniofilmico.org.co](http://www.patrimoniofilmico.org.co).

[4] As Robert Allen has often commented (2006), the automatic association of cinemagoing with modernity and urbanity needs to be questioned as a historiographic paradigm. There were rural or small-town film audiences in Colombia in the 1940s; the Ministry of Education ran an interesting, though short-lived, project involving mobile film screenings from 1938 to 1941. However, the extremely limited number of prints and the lack of distribution contracts make it very unlikely that Colombian films were shown outside the main cities. The history of film exhibition and filmgoing in the vast and diverse rural areas of Colombia, as in many other places, remains to be written.

[5] *El Tiempo*, April 4th 1943, quoted by Martínez Pardo, Op. Cit. p. 94.

[6] *El Tiempo*, May 10th 1945, quoted by Martínez Pardo, Op. Cit. p. 112

[7] According to a publication by the central bank of Colombia, by 1940 one American dollar equalled 1.75 Colombian pesos. Thus, \$0.10 pesos would be roughly US\$0.057. Of course these figures would need to be compared to wages, acquisitive capacity, and other variables, before further analysis is possible. As an indicator, a minimum wage was first established in Colombia in 1949, at COP\$2 per day. *El Banco de la República: Antecedentes, Evolución y Estructura*, Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1990.

[8] 'Divertida... sin vulgaridad! Romántica... sin melosidad! Intelectual... pero asimilable! Hecha con todo el arte que pueden exigir los espíritus selectos, pero con la idea primordial de divertir a todos los públicos de todas las latitudes! En el teatro que cuida de su prestigio: Roxy.' *El Espectador*, May 3rd, 1939. p. 10.

[9] Emilia, 'El triángulo francés', *El Espectador*, April 24th 1938.

[10] Poldy, 'Sobre el cinema', *El Espectador*, April 28th 1938.

[11] Laverde, Eduardo, 'Una polémica sobre el cine', *El Espectador*, April 29th 1938.

[12] *El Tiempo*, May 5th, 1938.

### **Biographical note**

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